

Readings

Romans 13: 8 – 14

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Matthew 18: 15 – 20

Jesus said: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

Reflection

The opening ballad (which you can hear at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkF2reI4U58> – when the option comes up, you'll need to skip through the adverts) to this musical **Aspects of Love** proclaims that

Love, love changes everything, hands and faces, earth and sky
Love, love changes everything
How you live and how you die
Love, can make the summer fly
Or a night seem like a lifetime
Yes love, love changes everything
Now I tremble at your name
Nothing in the world will ever be the same

Love, love changes everything
Days are longer, words mean more
Love, love changes everything
Pain is deeper, than before

Love, will turn your world around
And that world will last forever
Yes, love, love changes everything
Brings you glory, brings you shame
Nothing in the world will ever be the same
Off into the world we go
Planning futures, shaping years
Love bursts in and suddenly
All our wisdom disappears
Love, makes fools of everyone
All the rules we make are broken
Yes, love, love changes everyone, live or perish, in its flame
Love will never ever let you be the same
Love will never ever let you be the same

Songwriters: Buble Michael Steven, Chang Alan Pei Jei
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Writing to the Christians in Rome, St Paul reminds them of the Ten Commandments by naming some of them – he's probably sure that they can remember them all.

Over the years, the Ten Commandments have not always enjoyed a good press. People – and perhaps understandably – have focused on the 'You shall not ...' words and so seen and portrayed them as negative. But is that fair? Was that their intention?

In life – and especially in sport – we need to know what the rules are so that can get the maximum enjoyment by functioning within them. Some would argue it doesn't matter how we behave – so long as we enjoy life. Whilst we might enjoy living that way, ignoring the rules inevitably means that somebody else somewhere will pay a price for that and quite often ourselves as well.

After an encounter with the Sadducees, a Pharisee came to Jesus ^{“35”} ... an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22: 35 – 40). Of course, we say this most Sundays as the Summary of the Law from the liturgy that we are using this morning for our Holy Communion.

But there is a truth here that we can miss if we do not pay attention. The Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 20: 1 – 17) are first and foremost about a relationship – a relationship with the One God who brought his people out of their slavery in Egypt and the people who he rescued through the Passover. Afterwards, in the desert, He gave his people the Commandments to live by not because he was cruel and heartless and wanted to curtail their fun but because he wanted them to live at peace – with him first and foremost but also with each other. We can't live at peace with each other if we don't respect God, ourselves and each other and learn to curb our inherent tendency to behave as if we are the only ones who matter and that what we want / need is the most important thing.

In our society, it is very tempting and even apparently easy to run after the world as it chases after the prizes of power, money, social status or anything else. However, if we do that we will always be running and striving to attain that which does not last.

The Bible tells us that the Israelites did that on many occasions – they wandered from their God and how he asked them to live and so worshipped other idols and gods. As a result, they ended up in physical exile in Babylonia. But, perhaps worse, they ended up in spiritual slavery to the false gods who could not redeem them and their sins.

Amazingly, God did not leave them in exile and doesn't leave us in spiritual exile either. He loves us too much for that. So, he sent his son – his only begotten son – Jesus to take on human flesh, to walk amongst us, experience life as we experience it with all of its joys, frustrations and temptations. And yet, he stayed true to the Father and to the Commandments. In that sense he came to fulfil the law – the Torah as the Hebrews call the first five Books of the Old Testament – and not to do away with it. He came to show us the Father, to show us what love looks like and how much God loves each and every one of us. He came – quite literally – to die for us that we might live. Jesus went to the cross – not because he deserved to as if he done wrong – but because he knew that it was only with his innocent death that he could undo the corruption of sin and death and redeem us through a second passover. He opened wide his arms for us on the cross – to welcome those who come to him in faith but also to demonstrate the extent of God's love for us. If you stand with your arms outstretched, you can't open them any wider and that is how much God loves us – he can't do any more for us, to welcome us. John puts it in his Gospel this way ^{“12”} My command is this: Love each other as

I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15: 12 – 13).

God calls us to love a different way. He calls us to live in God's love and to share that love with one another. He wants us to put the needs of others first – be that through the Foodbank, the Winter Night Shelter or any other work that we can do to help others. Let's make no mistake here, we can't earn the love of God in any way at all – that is just simply beyond us. We can't buy God's love either. The amazing thing is that he loved us first and sent Jesus to die for us. Those of us who respond to his love are his disciples and we try to walk in his way. But if we open our hearts to receive God's love we can't then help but do good to others in response.

The musical **West Side Story** is a re-telling of the story of Romeo and Juliet – the star-crossed lovers from two different families separated by a bitter feud. It is set in the gang culture of New York. Its closing song (which you can hear here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= SQ4ogstDVE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ4ogstDVE)) emotionally says

Someday, somewhere
We'll find a new way of living
Will find a way of forgiving
Somewhere

There's a place for us
Somewhere a place for us
Peace and quiet and open air wait for us
Somewhere

There's a time for us
Someday there'll be a time for us
Time together with time to spare
Time to learn, time to care

Someday, somewhere
We'll find a new way of living
Will find there's a way of forgiving
Somewhere, somewhere, somewhere

There's a place for us
A time and a place for us
Hold my hand and we're halfway there
Hold my hand and I'll take you there
Somehow, someday, somewhere

Songwriters: Stephen Sondheim, Leonard Bernstein
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and that is true for us.

Whatever we may feel may separate us from God is in reality nothing for God loves us just as we are – but too much to leave us that way. God calls each us to reach out and put our hand into his outstretched hand so that he can draw us to himself. With our hand in his, he wants to lead us to a better place and to a better life – a place of love, joy and peace. And, if we respond to God's love, we can't but help show that love to others. In so doing we are truly fulfilling the law: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Matthew 22: 37 – 39).

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